

NBC NIGHTLY NEWS
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CUBA

BROKAW: Guess where Robert Vesco has turned up? He's the well-known fugitive who's been on the run from the federal government for more than 10 years now. New evidence now has surfaced that Vesco and Cuba have been working together on a number of projects. As Brian Ross reports in this Special Segment tonight on the Vesco connection, some of that evidence turned up during the invasion of Grenada.

ROSS: In the 10 years Robert Vesco has been on the run, he has used the millions he is accused of stealing on Wall Street to make himself welcome in the Bahamas, in Costa Rica, and now, according to American authorities, Vesco is busy making himself welcome in Cuba doing favors for a new protector, Fidel Castro. Federal authorities say one of Vesco's first favors for Castro was on Grenada. In the days since the American invasion in bombed-out Grenadian government buildings, Army intelligence found evidence amidst the rubble that Vesco had come here to meet with Grenadian government officials. And NBC News has learned that Vesco played an important role in the construction of the airfield that so troubled President Reagan. Cuban army construction workers spent more than two years here and were able to build most of the new airfield at Point Salines without outside help. But the Cubans did not have the right equipment for one of the trickiest parts of the job, putting the runway over *Hardy Bay. Federal authorities say Vesco, through an intermediary, secretly arranged for a Florida dredging company to come to Florida to dredge the bay. Federal authorities say Vesco's intermediary was Michael *Yamanas, a convicted drug smuggler who is now a federal witness providing information about Vesco's activities on behalf of the Cubans. An official of the Florida dredging company said the company did not know anything about Vesco but confirmed that the company got the Grenada job through a Michael Yamanas. Yamanas has reportedly told federal authorities that Vesco's man on Grenada was Finance Minister and Deputy Prime Minister Bernard Coard, now under arrest in Grenada. And that part of the airport deal, Yamanas says he gave Coard a \$45,000 pay-off. Vesco's help with the airport here in Grenada was important to the Cubans, and since then, federal authorities say Vesco has gone on to do a lot more for the Cubans. Using his connections with drug smugglers and organized crime figures, Vesco has set up an extensive network in the United States and Canada to smuggle American high technology products into Cuba. This is one of Vesco's shipments that never made it to Cuba, an advanced sugar cane processor available only in the United States. The machinery was bought by a dummy company set up by Vesco with money sent by Vesco from Cuba. But U.S. customs agents in Brownsville, Texas, seized the machinery just before it was to be loaded on the plane and smuggled to Havana. The man who ran the smuggling operation for

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Vesco was an old friend, the mafia boss in Toronto, Canada, Albert *Volpy. Volpy, who was arrested in Texas, is now a fugitive back in Toronto after Vesco arranged for him to be bailed out of jail. POZIO: Government officials in Cuba and Mr. Vesco...

ROSS: U.S. customs agent Henry *Pozio says Vesco is very valuable to the Cubans, and they are giving him first-class treatment. POZIO: He's living in Havana, Cuba in a beach-front estate, and with a yacht, boat ramp. The whole thing has been provided for him by the Cuban government.

ROSS: Federal authorities say what Vesco is doing for the Cubans is not because he necessarily likes Fidel Castro's politics, but because Robert Vesco is just running out of places to hide. Brian Ross, NBC News, Grenada.